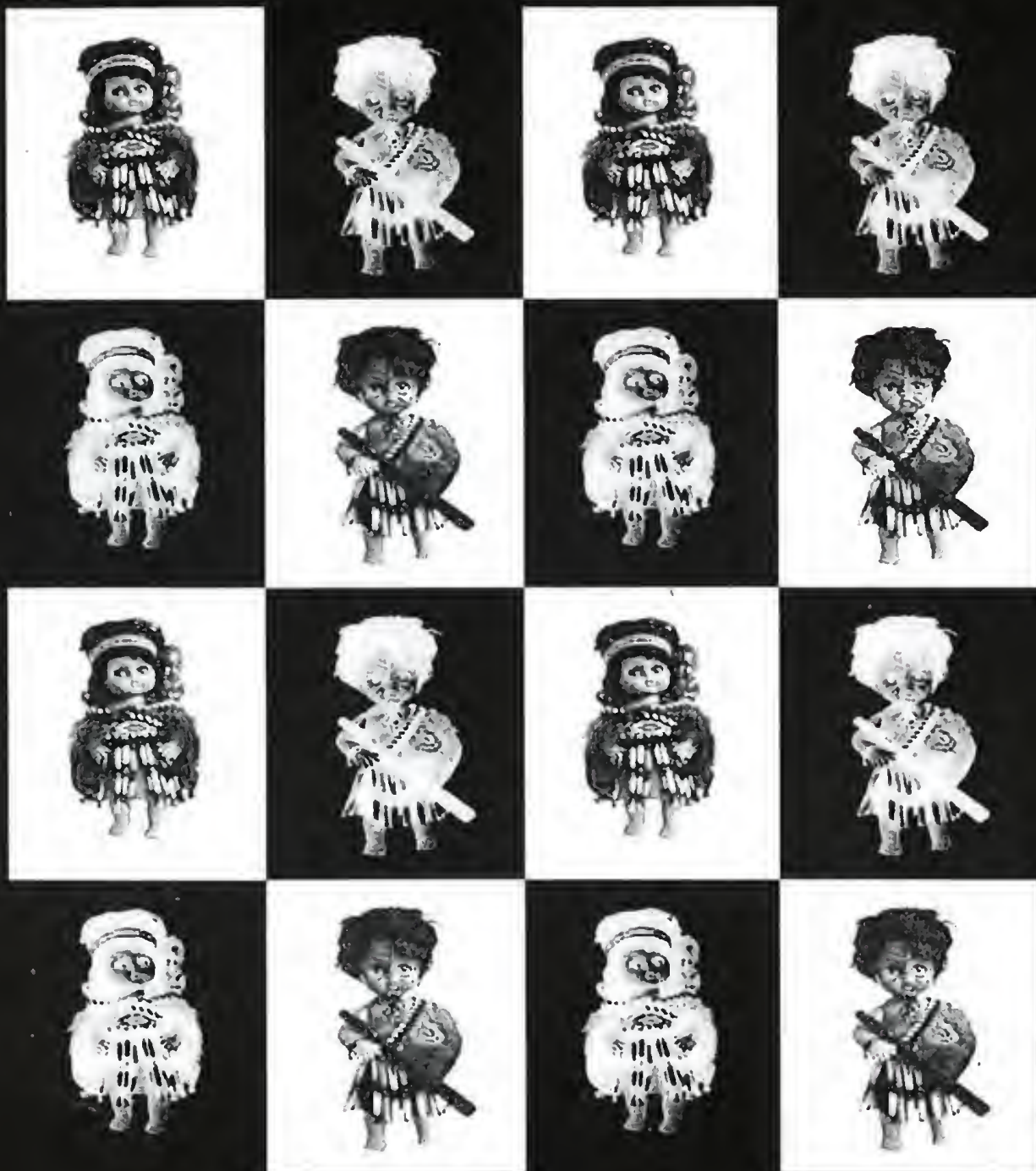


socialist review

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issue 7 winter 2001 \$2



culture wars

terry eagleton • drugs & capitalism • may day • feminisms • identity politics

RADICALS LURE OUR KIDS!



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In the next Socialist Review...

Whatever your political colour, it's impossible to deny the importance of the growing "anti-capitalist" movement around the world. In our Spring issue we'll take an in-depth look at the politics of anti-capitalism. To subscribe, turn to page 22.



We welcome your letters: Please send to either of the addresses below



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MAY DAY!

[Melbourne]

Dougal McNeill was a member of the group from the ISO in Aotearoa who travelled to Melbourne to support the M1 action there. This is his eyewitness account.



Part of the M1 Melbourne action

I was one of three International Socialists comrades from Dunedin who were lucky enough to be able to travel over to Melbourne in May of this year to take part in anti-capitalist actions there. It was probably the most amazing political experience of my life so far.

In many ways, I felt all the obvious feelings that I guess most young activists get when they attend their first truly big action: the sense of elation being part of an 8,000 strong crowd marching through central Melbourne; that great feeling of solidarity you have linking arms and talking with people you've never met before on a blockade; the powerful sense of anger that gets fired up in you when you hear speakers tell of the racism, environmental destruction, attacks on workers' rights and structural sexism that characterise our societies. But more importantly for me, perhaps, were the broader lessons I drew from the experience in Melbourne for the future of the anti-capitalist movement both overseas and here in Aotearoa.

Because Aotearoa is so small we are almost totally reliant on media reports for our understanding of what is happening in the rest of the world. M1 in Melbourne made me confident enough of my own opinions and experiences to disbelieve mainstream media attempts to write off the growing revolt against global capital as "riots". But I also think we as socialists need to be careful we don't think that, by wishing it will become one, this movement is necessarily yet a "world historic" event.

M1 started early in the morning. By 6am around 500 people – mainly from activist groups, had assembled outside the Melbourne Stock Exchange. The atmosphere in the early morning was bizarre: while all around me all people seemed to be doing was smiling,

talking, forming blockades and selling various political newspapers, the Stock Exchange itself and surrounding buildings had been protected the night before with two metre high barrier walls flanked by rows of mounted police. This contradiction, between the peaceful, friendly protesters the media always blame for "violence" and the heavily armed, aggressive police, continued throughout the day.

As the dawn arrived and lit up a but-for-the-demonstrators

surprisingly deserted Melbourne CBD, more and more people drifted in to the blockade. We now numbered around 2,000. We extended our lines further up the street, shutting off an intersection and closing a local McDonalds. People were chanting "No child labour! Close McDonalds down!" The atmosphere was calm but determined, angry but in control. May Day was, once again, to

become our day. Paint was handed around and we "redecorated" this symbol of corporate greed with slogans and statements. Then on to the headquarters of Yallourn Energy – currently at the centre of an industrial dispute – where we closed them down through a blockade. Again a wall of unsmiling cops protected the bosses' property.

Perhaps the most inspiring moment of the whole day came at 11:30am when we were joined for a unity rally by around 6,000 workers who had struck on May Day. This was the first time workers have struck on May Day in Victoria in 65 years! The streets were alive with placards, banners, flags, chants – all the symbols and signs of a working movement in revival. The rest of the day was spent closing down a whole host of anti-democratic and corporate targets throughout Melbourne. From Shell Oil to the Liberal Party Headquarters, from the

Nike Superstore to the Ministry of Immigration, for one day none of the bastions of tyranny in Melbourne were safe from this mass force of workers, activists, worker-activists, students and Aboriginal campaigners united to shut them down. It felt amazing.

M1 proved quite visibly why it is that we as socialists point to the working class as the only group in society who have the potential power to end the rule of capital. When workers strike in force, and strike over social and political as well as economic issues, they shake the very foundations of this rotten society. M1 showed that – in Victoria at least – the effects of the anti-capitalist movement around the world are also causing changes in workers' consciousness, making them more willing to fight over political and general issues.

I was also struck by the crying need we have in Aotearoa to build a viable revolutionary socialist alternative. It was the intervention of socialist organisations in M1 that made the difference – radicalising the workers' unity rally and encouraging the participants in it to join in the blockades and encouraging the blockaders to join the unity rally with the workers. While various sundry "anarchist" organisations organised "carnivals against capitalism" and descended to the heights of sublime irrelevancy, in the centre of Melbourne we actually managed to close the corporate tyrants down. In a large part this was due to the discipline, leadership, open-mindedness and simple hard work of the socialist organisations. Their effort was an inspiring thing to see.

The anti-capitalist movement has already begun to make itself felt in Aotearoa. We need to build on this, to keep the momentum of events like M1 alive and happening in Australasia. Because, as always, we still have a world to win. ■

M1 in Zürich...

Hoch Sie! Internationale Solidarität!

Story and photo captions by *Andrew Tait* in Zürich

**Switzerland:
Cuckoo
clocks,
chocolate and
secret bank
accounts?
Teargas,
water
cannons and
international
solidarity!**

A foreign land, a strange language, an unfamiliar city: Zürich. Even while May Day in Aotearoa slipped into May night, in another time zone I was on the morning train into Zürich city. I had the address of the meeting point, but couldn't find it. The city was quiet, closed for the public holiday. I asked a cop standing by the side of the road and she pointed me down the street. Then it was easy, I just followed the trail of police strung out along the route.

Suddenly I heard noise from around a corner, and the march emerged, chanting the theme of the day "Hoch Sie!, Internationale Solidarität!" Anarchists, trade unionists, socialists, the Kurdish communists (and all their kids), and the Tamils, Palestinians, Somalis, Turks, little



*Swiss wickerwork and tear gas launchers –
the cops defend the flash end of town*



*Split from the main march by teargas
and water cannons a group of
protesters fords the river to escape*

children and old women, and a big truck blasting out the music of The Clash. The worker might have no country, but where there's a May Day demo they need never be alone. I marched with the media union alongside the music truck, the *Guns of Brixton* booming off the old stone walls.

One of my workmates had said, "I don't know why the Swiss protest, don't they know when they've got it good?" Perhaps they have got a good standard of living now, but nothing stands still. Between 20 and 25 percent of the workforce are not citizens, and immigration is one of the hottest political

issues. During the post war boom European capitalism imported "guest workers", much like New Zealand capitalists recruited Pacific Islanders, but citizenship was guarded jealously. In the cooler economic climate of the past decade, there is a sense more and more of the continent becoming a fortress. I was proud to be a socialist when I saw this march take the lead on one of the most contentious issues.

At midday the march – 10,000 strong – rallied in the city centre for the usual May Day speeches. The main speaker was Leila Khaled from the left-wing Popular

Front for the Liberation of Palestine – another courageous move. By now though, the cops started moving in, and the “Schwarze Bloc” or black bloc demonstrators started stirring. The rally split with some heading for the Kaserne park and an all-day party, clearing the way for the “Nachdemo”.

Cat and Mouse

The police were out in force, armed with water cannons, riot helmets, shields and teargas grenades. At this stage we were mostly young people, enthusiastic, angry and completely directionless. While there were a couple of socialists on that demo, the biggest presence was the black bloc; hooded, masked teenage “anarchists”.



The theme of the march, International Solidarity, inspired these protesters to strip off – to nothing but their Swiss passports

Cut off by the police from the ritzy end of town, we marched (or were herded) to the poorer area where vandalism didn't matter so much to the cops. On a bridge we stopped, the police blocked off most routes out of there, but it would have made no difference, we had no strategy and no goal.

Then within five minutes the demo was over. The police surged forward, firing teargas into the thick of the crowd. My eyes burning from the acid, tears streaming, and my lungs choking, I ran down the street, through a parking lot that spanned the river, hoping to catch my breath and rejoin the rest of the demo. I saw a cluster of people, one of them lying on the ground, and I jogged over to see what was up. Before I was there the group turned, one man flicking out a long

baton like a switchblade – then I saw the spray canister: the man crouching over the fallen body wasn't helping him – he'd just wasted him with pepper spray. I turned and ran again.

And that was pretty much the pattern. Perhaps 1,000 or perhaps 5,000 of us played cat and mouse with the polizei through Zürich's narrow streets. Without any common purpose or goal we were splintered into smaller and smaller groups. I'd had enough when my “contingent” of the demo was broken down to 10 or 20 people. There were no chants, pamphlets or magazines. It was over. I retreated to the Kaserne and the party.

The first thing I saw was a spring green field of playing children, and then a tent city with all the foods of the world; stalls where you could buy a beer and join a union, or get a picture of Che Guevara and Abdullah Ocalan with your Kurdish kebab.

Weighing up the good and bad with a splitting headache

The teargas was still slamming my brain up against my skull like a Gestapo thug in an interrogation room, when I sat back that night with a bottle of retsina (don't even think about it) and tried to weigh up the good and the bad of the day.

The thousands of people and the comradeship at the morning demo and the party afterwards stood out against the futility of the nachdemo. Of course the



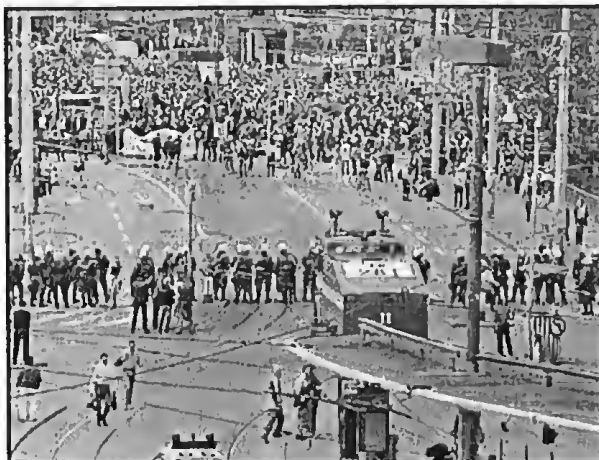
A lull in the battle as police face off against “Schwarze Bloc” protesters

news spoke about stone-throwing anarchistic vandals, but all I saw was teenagers playing a dangerous game with the police. There were a few revolutionary socialist organisations there, but debate, arguing politics, recruiting didn't seem to be happening.

It's hard for someone with the German language skills of a three year old to assess what was going on, but it seemed there was no realisation that physical force on the streets and workers' solidarity could achieve anything. People working together with a sense of purpose and a goal can take the initiative back from the state and their hired thugs. But instead we became victims, incapable even of getting twenty or thirty people together to rescue the guy who was pinned in the parking lot.

The black bloc anarchists in Zürich weren't able to provide any leadership, and with the lack of a clear revolutionary leadership making socialist arguments, anarchism filled the political vacuum. The black bloc never turned up for the party afterwards, perhaps unwilling to take off their masks.

What we need is a combination: the comradeship, cooperation and strength of the morning demo and the party, and the radical militancy of the nachdemo. Then we'll drop it at a higher level. ■



Police move in on the midday rally – the speaker was Leila Khaled from the left-wing Palestinian PFLP

M1 in Dunedin:

While three of our members were away in Melbourne, we organised and implemented a small scale action here in Dunedin. Our motivations were twofold – both to express solidarity with those organising events around the rest of the world and in Aotearoa, and to celebrate the day traditionally owned by the working class as our day to make our voices heard.

A number of us met at the university union and walked into town. We hadn't intended to draw attention to ourselves at that point but managed without even trying, as we were carrying placards, balloons, wings, masks, banners and drums, the aim of which could be summed up in one word: visibility. Gathering at McDonalds (*"close down Mackers – May Day is for workers!"*) at midday were a diverse group of environmentalists, socialists, the Alliance, Greens, and others. The mood was highly festive and

celebratory. We chanted, stamped our feet, beat drums, blew whistles and shook noisemakers, in a beautifully rhythmic fashion, and with the inspiration offered by good old-fashioned unity and solidarity.

The open megaphone offered the George Street shoppers a sample of the range of causes that find their mutual enemy in corporate greed. We made a lot of noise for an hour and then, in line with our own principles *"stop the hypocrisy, give us democracy"*, we democratically decided to move on to Starbucks, where we criticised their revolting coffee and managed to make a plea for the importance of *"human need over corporate greed"* as well.

Enthusiasm proved to be difficult to temper, and at 2pm we were still marching, making music and chanting as we made our way back down George Street. The most exciting aspect of the whole day was the simple festivity in making a point against so

obvious an enemy, not just McDonalds and Starbucks but a wider phenomenon: capitalism, with the profit motive as its sole driving force over and above the majority of the world's population and the environment.

We witnessed not just solidarity, but the capacity for unity between many on the left, and gave those involved a sense of some sort of potential to build from where we already are, to further *"globalise the revolt"*. ■

Penny Hayes

(Okay, the background picture above wasn't really taken in Dunedin! – it's from the brilliant Quebec anti-FTAA action in April...)



...this photo, on the other hand, definitely *was* taken in the deep south – it's our friend Otago University Vice-Chancellor Graeme Fogelberg, and we're giving away a year's free subscription to this magazine for the person who comes up with the best caption for it.

Entries to "Caption Contest", P O Box 11207, Wellington, or email isonz@hotmail.com – and remember to include your name and contact details.

Rae Sinclair:

In our socialist organisation it is consistently women that are asked to speak on issues of women's oppression and liberation. This never fails to enrage me! For a number of reasons:

Firstly, for reasons I cannot fully explain, asking a woman to talk on women's oppression seems to me to be patronising, condescending and even sexist. My gut reaction is to say, "Why

don't you men give the talk, after all, you're the oppressors! Why don't you tell us why you do it and when you are going to stop."

Secondly, I am a woman but I do not feel as though I am oppressed by my gender. Obviously I cannot deny that women in our society are, in fact, oppressed. There are screeds of statistics to show that they are.

Women earn less money than men, are more likely to be the victims of violence in the home, are more likely to be disadvantaged by a relationship break-up, take more responsibility for work in the home and so on, the list is endless. However I do not believe that I am more or less oppressed than anyone else, male or female, in my socioeconomic position. The oppression or lack of power, related to a low socioeconomic position has a greater effect on me and my life than my gender. I find it difficult, therefore, to talk of oppression of women, when I see it as secondary to other oppression.

I cannot see how it would be useful to talk about how women's oppression manifests itself statistically in society when it is not something that I experience personally. I think that I do not consider myself oppressed by being a woman as I was born in the early 1960s and grew up amongst the women's liberation movement of the 1960s and '70s.

Women were modelled to me, not as

submissive second-class citizens, but as people that recognised injustice in society, fought to change it and achieved their aims. In my eyes, women are a strong, powerful and determined group that took on the establishment and won.

This brings me to my third point, which may be considered minor and pedantic, but I believe that the terms "women's liberation" and "oppression" are firmly associated with Second Wave feminism of the bra-burning 1960s and '70s and to continue to use these terms is to fail to acknowledge the gains that the women's movement made. I would like to suggest that the socialist movement find different terms to describe sexism and the inequalities between genders.

Of course it must always be remembered that as Marxist/socialists our first division when describing society must always be class. A woman's place in society determines the type of and how much oppression they are subjected to. A rich woman suffers less oppression than a poor woman (and a poor man, for that matter.) She may still be exposed to sexist behaviour and gender inequalities but it is likely to be different than that experienced by a poor woman. Issues of ethnicity and related power differentials must also be

considered.

In other words women cannot be considered as a mass homogeneous group. It was useful to do this during Second Wave feminism as there were obvious structural inequalities that affected all women to fight against, such as the call for equal pay for equal work. It was also appropriate for a small group of women (Second Wave feminism was dominated by white middle class women) to led the struggle for issues that affected all women. However, now that it seems that gender inequality and sexism is situated in the social level, rather than the structural level, it is no longer appropriate to think of women as just one group.

Feminists generally concur with this and have responded by forming different camps, influenced by postmodernism and identity politics. All camps have differing opinions as to the cause of oppression and the way to move on from here. With the absence of structural inequalities, enshrined in law, the fight for "women's liberation" has ground to a halt.

So, what are the central points of my objection then? Although the "pay women to stay at home" and "backlash" crowds are clearly heading to right-wing conclusions, we should remember

Two ISO members debate... women's oppression

discussion

they do have some good points. But – and this is crucial – they still relate domestic labour to gender. Maybe this is the relationship we should be focussing in on, and focussing on removing.

I worry that as an organisation and as a tradition we've been too quick to dismiss these good points that other arguments can bring up. The same could be said for postmodernism. Identity politics makes the good point that, surprise surprise, different people are oppressed in different ways for different reasons. Surely this will also mean there are going to be different ways of organising and talking about their resistances?

Women's oppression in society can't be something that can be left until "after the revolution" for two really obvious – but often neglected – reasons. Firstly, this revolution may be a long way off yet, and women don't want to – and shouldn't have to – wait that long for the end of oppression. Secondly, the revolution will probably come about a lot quicker if we can manage to stop fighting between the genders and instead focus out together.

But none of this will make the slightest bit of difference unless, before and after the revolution, we have learnt to value housework more – not just as the "boring stuff" that needs doing, but as the work of survival we can't do without.

Until then, visions of both women's "liberation", however outdated that word might be, and the liberation of society will stay as nothing but dreams. ■

[reply] *Penny Hayes*

A socialist perspective identifies the central role that class plays in stratifying the society in which we live. With regard to feminism, this is highlighted in the important distinction between the interests of, say, the female chief executive of Telecom, or your average working class woman employed at the local chocolate factory. However, within the context of capitalism, women are still subordinate to men, in the sense that they are more likely to be employed in the working class, that housework is unpaid and undervalued, and they still maintain most responsibility for child care.

As socialists however, we would reject the notion that men on their own are the deliberate perpetrators of women's oppression, with no other objective in mind. Oppression and liberation based on gender are the result of social constructions of what it means to be female and what it means to be male. Importantly, these constructions mean nothing unless they are defined in response to or in contrast with each other.

One clear way in which the role of

women and men is defined is with respect to labour. The gendered division of labour that places men in the public sphere of paid work outside the home and women in the private sphere of unpaid work in the home is vital to the oppression of women – this is widely accepted amongst the left. What isn't as widely accepted is the way in which this is related to the productive capacity of capitalism and the wider issue of class oppression, which underpins a socialist or Marxist feminism.

Unpaid work in the home sustains paid work outside the home. It is far easier to go out and earn a living when you come home to a clean house and a cooked meal every night. In this sense, the undervalued, unpaid work of looking after the house and family has a direct impact on the productivity of the working class and for this reason is central to profitability.

The social construction of gender that contributes to this outcome works in the interests of the capitalist class, allowing it to generate its unprecedented levels of output and profit. The ruling class will go to the ends of the Earth to construct and reconstruct gender differences to its advantage, as these differences manifest themselves in the gendered division of labour. It also has the rather useful side effect of creating some sense of division between men and women, which underpins the unity of the working class as a collective force to be reckoned with.

So, yes, capitalism has specific effects on women and men generally speaking as an outcome of its structural needs,





more crucially linked to class and relations of production than to gender or ethnicity. The use of the terms "oppression" and "liberation" are still relevant to the class struggle – our key aim in this regard being the full and total emancipation of the worker.

However, it is a mistake to assume that the centrality of class renders the analysis of other types of stratification redundant. As long as you can speak of inequality as it relates to a specific group in comparison to another group – and there is no denying that fact – the terms "oppression" and "liberation" remain useful, even if your explanation of that struggle is formulated within the context of another struggle (the class struggle).

The argument has often been put forward that we have made progress, but we have not reached a point where gender inequality is situated at the social and not the structural level. It is true we have moved closer to "illusory" structural equality, given that in most if not all the advanced capitalist societies it is illegal to discriminate against people on the basis of sex, but it is highly misleading to argue that gender inequality is not structural given its lack of overt appearance in the form of legalised discrimination. Rather like the class struggle, the legally equal status of men and women (or employees and employers) is not reflective of reality.

While it is the social construction of gender that generates and supports the continued oppression of women, this is maintained deliberately as a pathway to further profitability. This is precisely the way in which the social interacts with and is inseparable from the institutional or structural level, in terms of both gender inequality and the wider class struggle. The removal of overtly institutional discriminatory practices

against women in the statute books is merely a step – a good starting point – but there is a long way to go.

Clearly, as outlined above, there are structural causes of women's oppression which are not arbitrary – relating to the needs of the ruling class. This is not to say that all women are oppressed. The extent to which we each are individually subjected to sexism and the diverse ways in which we interpret let alone experience it are enough to make women a highly heterogeneous group. However, by recognising the structural role played by gender construction it is possible to step beyond the superficial differences of experience and acknowledge that, as women, our common enemy is not men but the context (capitalism) which results in the desirability of the construction of gender identity.

While not trying to ignore the concrete realities of dealing with one's experience, its usefulness in actually fighting oppression is limited, in both spurring collective action, and in blurring the perspective of an individual. I am a woman in my mid-twenties, and I don't consider myself oppressed by my gender. I am a postgraduate university student, and believe my father when he tells me I could be a civil engineer if I wanted to. I don't think I am treated differently as a woman. However, how the hell am I to know how I would be treated as a male? I've never been one... nor with three sisters have I seen my parents treat a son any differently to me.

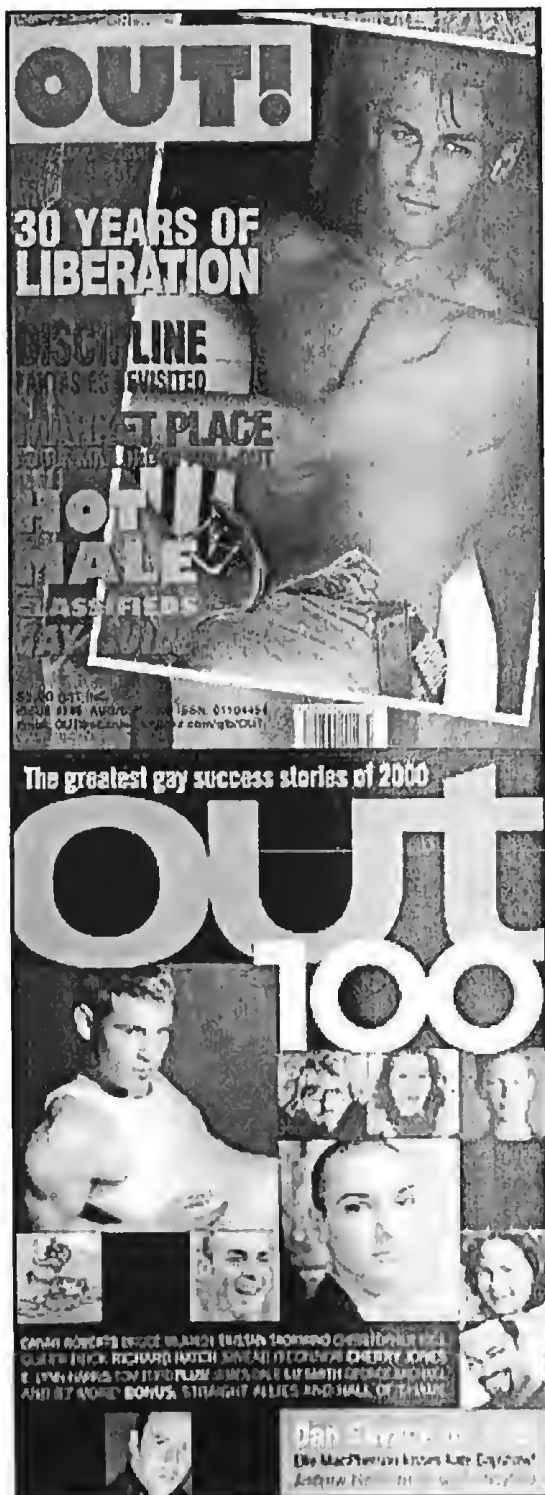
The point is, my experience is limited and myopic, but that doesn't prevent me from understanding oppression in the world around me, and it certainly doesn't make me not want to fight against it, nor does it make me feel ill-equipped for the task. Furthermore,

rather than thinking of women's oppression as a women's issue, we should all own it. In practice that means that men as well as women should be giving talks on International Women's Day and the Beauty Myth, and marching to Reclaim the Night. Not because they are the perpetrators (although some obviously are), but because it is their family members, friends and comrades who are beaten, raped, and killed, suffer eating disorders and depression, and fight heroically for better working conditions and manage the household all at the same time.

Under a truly democratic socialism, such invisible structural sources of gender oppression will be far less essential to sustaining capitalism's profitability. The absence of such pressures will make it much easier to challenge constructions of gender identity. Quite rightly though, for both reasons mentioned, the issue of gender inequality can't be left until after the revolution, and in the meantime, the role of a socialist organisation is a busy and varied one.

We must continue to support the fight for the liberation of women (and men), both in protest and when confronted in our daily lives with sexism and unfounded expectations of gender identity. Internally as an organisation we have to examine ourselves and our practices to ensure that we combat the effects of outside influences. But most importantly, we must continue to fight for the emancipation of the working class. ■

Identity politics: Commodification is *not* liberation!



The history of oppression is lengthy and extremely varied in form, style, and content. That much is clear. Our understanding of oppression in our everyday lives, and where this comes from, is perhaps less obvious to many. Consider the experience of "queer" individuals in contemporary Aotearoa. I give it the qualification "queer" because the word needs be recognised for what it is: a random identity, a created term. We could equally easily speak of gay, or same gender oriented persons, to use any one of several prejudiced and inadequate ruling class labels. Identity politics are problematic precisely because they make sexuality a person's primary social affiliation, rather than asking the questions of what you do, where you do it, and who tells you to do it (if anyone).

This isn't to suggest that sex is apolitical, but rather that the situations surrounding it are much more complex. As revolutionaries involved in the fight against hatred we see the liberation movement as central to the wider political struggle. More importantly, ours is a significant and increasingly vocal element, both as activists and as ex-victims. Queers have been stigmatised, marginalised, and more often than not made the victims of violence, whether it's committed directly, or indirectly through the socialised language of aggressive capitalist ideology.

What constitutes this process? In the first place, it's derived from the sense of isolation capitalism engenders and thrives on. As theory, it's summed up nicely in Marx's understanding of alienation which states that organised capital oppresses communities and individuals by separating them from direct ownership of the means of production. In practice, the atomisation and competition that results from this sets people at each other's throats, in all kinds of different ways (just take a good look around you next time you're downtown).

At the same time, the exploitative nature of the system means people are evaluated only according to their productive potential, or labour value. In terms of sex and gender, this makes you cannon fodder, or cheap labour, or a captive market of consumers, and probably all three. In other words, who you fuck (and how you do it) is an important issue for the capitalist class, because it's a tangible, material matter that's going to affect profit margins, sooner or later.

How do they control the wildcard of human sexuality? By demonising sexuality through religion and through the conscious promotion of images of "appropriate" gender-determined behaviour, or by giving us preordained images of "queerness" - the camp, weak, pet-gay of women's shows or the "butch" mannish lesbian. These are false and insulting stereotypes, and are only a few of the more common methods of



social manipulation. Sounding self-indulgent? Well, not really - the way in which similar aspects of capitalist ideology have been used to specifically oppress women has been observed and fought against since the first days of the revolutionary socialist movement.

Its significance for queers is perhaps more recent, which is partly due to the relatively low profile of the liberation struggle. At the same time, a truly materialist critique that explains the nature of this oppression doesn't feature prominently in contemporary queer activism. Tendencies to "assimilate" (whatever that means) can't really tackle the subject, because in the end they don't ask the right questions, and they too readily accept the existing order as basically valid. The assumption made is that homophobia simply rises out of a cultural perspective (whatever one of those looks like) and fails to describe social conditions and the manner in which environment determines consciousness.

As for my ability to co-exist in any legal sense (coming down to property!)

- so what if a bunch of asset-mining, blandly reformist liberals can draft a piece of legislation (to be passed and protected by racist, sexist institutions like Parliament and the courts) informing us of our right to love whoever we choose (and congratulate themselves about it?) Who the fuck are they to claim to guard my freedom while in the same breath upholding the right of corporations to screw over workers,

rape the environment, and lust for American dollars? It takes an essentially vicious State to bring about one of the highest incidents of youth suicide in the world. This kind of harvest isn't an accident, and it isn't a situation that your local white male in Parliament is capable of solving. It's going to take a lot more to end the violence and the sadness perpetuated by the obscenity that is capitalism.

"Tolerance" campaigns and staying silent for a day have clearly failed miserably as tactics in the struggle to liberate Aotearoa's lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered communities. Despite the ability of "Will & Grace" types to live ostensibly "liberated" - and fucking privileged - lifestyles, for the rest of us day-to-day life as a queer in Aotearoa still means bashings, harassment and bigotry.

We're not going to convince an intolerant society to tolerate us by being politely silent, politely passive. It's time for us to bash back. The next time the Christian Right try to spread their vicious anti-queer trash in our city we're going to be there, closing their meeting down. And as socialists, we don't think it's good enough for only our queer members to be involved in the struggle against homophobia. We in the

International Socialists expect all our members, queer or straight, women or men, to get militant and angry in the campaign to eradicate homophobia from the face of the earth!

History has shown that we're at our most effective when all people oppressed by the capitalist class have come together, be they workers, women, queers, or people who are a combination of all three. For instance, in 1978 the first Gay Pride march in Sydney was attacked by police outside a building site. The builders' labourers rushed to the defence of the queers by turning the hoses used for concrete pours onto the police. Builders' labourers are not a group that most people would expect to have liberal attitudes towards homosexuality, but in New South Wales in the 1970s they were riding a wave of militancy that had turned them from people popularly presented as stupid into a well paid and powerful section of workers. They had won improved conditions for themselves and had gained the confidence to exert their new found industrial strength over broader social questions.



To rebuild this kind of attitude today demands a true understanding of the nature of the struggle and society, and requires us all to recognise that in the end there's really only one solution - the self emancipation of all oppressed workers, and the creation of a truly classless world. To end the persecution, we need to make the homophobes afraid. Don't get hurt, get organised! ■ J.P. Ryan

Legalise marijuana, heroin, cocaine, speed, LSD, Ecstasy, opium, mushrooms, mescaline, ketamine, peyote and ether! Provide accurate information on drugs to people of all ages! Fund independent scientific and social research into drugs! Supply cheap and safe prescribed drugs through doctors and pharmacies! Send every pig that's ever made a drug bust, every MP that's made the war on drugs into law, and every judge who's sent a user to prison straight to the ultra-violent, rape-filled, mentally abusive, soul destroying & life-stealing institutions they fill with innocent victims every day! Free all drug prisoners! Make a society where taking drugs can enrich lives rather than destroy them! Fight fear, misinformation, profit & prejudice!

Are you guys completely crazy?

Not at all. In the recent ISO branch meeting talk reproduced here, Simon argues that a number of vital questions need to be answered in any discussion about illegal drugs.

pigs, [drugs] & capitalism

**"But drug use leads to violence/
theft/assault/burglary/
vandalism/rape/child
molestation/immorality and
murder!"**

Prohibition forces some people (especially the less wealthy) into crime due to the addictiveness of cut drugs, the criminal contacts necessary to buy them, and the extreme expense of non-prescribed substances. "Crime" statistics are far more closely related to poverty and social inequality than drug use.

**"But people have to be punished
for breaking the law!"**

If a law is unjust, then breaking it is justified. Should people be sent to prison for opposing apartheid, going on strike, fighting for women's right to vote, being a pacifist, stealing food for a starving family or having an abortion? Laws are historical - if they're bad, the point is to change them! And what does punishment actually mean? In Australia 26% of those imprisoned report being victims of sexual assaults in jail with young offenders being most at risk. Is rape a suitable punishment for drug use? Perhaps sentencing should be altered to reflect the actual punishment metered out - i.e. "I sentence you to 12 months imprisonment, three lashings by prison officers, one rape by fellow inmates, the humiliation and degradation of any friends and family who visit, and infection with Hepatitis C". Now that's "truth in sentencing".

"But we've got to protect the children!"

Prohibition doesn't protect children, it exposes them to misinformation, crime, harassment, fear, ignorance and cut drugs of dangerous quality. Prohibition has never stopped young people from taking drugs. Prohibition often causes children to try "alternative" drugs such as datura that are sometimes very dangerous, hard to control dosage-wise and even harder to find out vital information about. And legalisation wouldn't force drugs on children, there could be safeguards such as a minimum age for supply, and remember: increased education and information would lead to safer outcomes.



**"If the majority of New
Zealanders wanted change, they
would have voted for it!"**

When has there ever been a referendum on legalisation? When has there ever even been accurate information available on legalisation? And when do we actually get what we vote for? Remember the EUB? Don't rely on politicians' promises - they have a proud history of breaking them! Policy change on important issues has never been brought about through simply voting-in the right benevolent politicians, no matter how well meaning they may be. Change comes through social pressure and activism. We have to push MPs into passing fairer laws - it's in our interest, not theirs!

"Just say No!"

Abstinence is a failed message that has proved completely unsuccessful and enormously damaging in every area where it has been applied.

"Just Say No" campaigns in schools, be they relating to sex education or drug and alcohol programmes are unrealistic - if something is enjoyable, people don't "Just Say No" without good reasons. "Just Say No" campaigns often exclude real education and availability of information on the subject in case this information leads people to actually say "Yes", and they are after all the product of a religious morality not relevant to the majority of people today.

"Legalisation would give a green light to Gangs and underworld crime!"

33% of Gang members in prison are affiliated to the Mongrel Mob, 36% to Black Power, 55% of New Zealand prison inmates are Maori. 10% are Pacific Islanders. The Gang Spectre is at best a rather blatantly racist argument used to keep the "average" New Zealander in a state of fear, to argue for increased police and judicial powers, and to keep the most oppressed people in New Zealand underfoot, unheard, and in prison. If the government were really concerned with combating the "criminal underworld", then prohibition, which forces drug manufacture and distribution into the hands of "criminals" would be replaced immediately with a system that puts manufacture and distribution in the hands of "responsible citizens" - i.e. legalisation.

"Drugs are harmful to your health / smoking marijuana leads to infertility, memory loss, a lack of motivation and will shrink the testes / LSD use induces schizophrenia and psychosis / if you smoke crack once, you're either addicted for life or dead / methamphetamine or "speed" rots the nasal passages and leads to violent and antisocial behaviour / IV drug use has caused an HIV epidemic / Ecstasy users may literally dance themselves to death!"

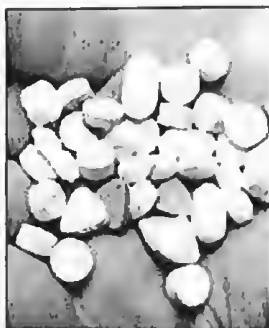
Most drugs do have negative effects on your health. But keep things in perspective! The legal drug tobacco is 10 times as addictive as proscribed heroin. According to Health Minister Annette King, in the years 1994-96 the illegal drug cannabis was responsible for one death, the legal substance alcohol was directly responsible for 419 deaths and directly implicated in another 509. We will never have accurate information about what the real effects of drugs on health are, until scientists and social researchers are allowed to legally study these substances.

Prohibition not only leads to misinformation, but also makes drugs far more addictive and worse for you than they might otherwise have been. If something is potentially bad for you, should we really ban it? Lets ban rock climbing, driving, swimming, eating and sex. That'll fix the problem!

Any drug can be made even more dangerous - simply ban it. If caffeine were made illegal tomorrow (and the idea has been proposed more than once), we would soon have gangsters selling baggies of illegal coffee (but with everything from rat poison to Sudafed. Coffee OD cases would fill the A&E. The price would go up so wildly that coffee addicts would soon begin to steal to support their habit, and users would begin injecting highly concentrated caffeine to get more bang for their buck, in the process passing on all sorts of needle-borne diseases.

"But if drugs are illegal, they will be harder to get!"

There is little evidence that the prohibition of marijuana for example, has led to a decrease in supply - in fact, the availability of marijuana in NZ, and its usage has steadily increased over the last two decades. If drugs are illegal, they are very hard to control, legalisation gives much greater possibility for control and monitoring through doctors and pharmacies, if that control and monitoring is actually needed.



"Soft drug use leads to hard drug abuse!"

The distinction between soft and hard drugs is a false one, based on no general scientific agreement. What is a "hard" drug? One that can lead to hallucinations? Memory loss? Antisocial behaviour? Sounds like alcohol doesn't it?! The health and social effects of drugs have far less to do with which "class" they fall under in law, than history, profit and politics. The arguments that try to separate drugs into hard and soft are mostly based on media misinformation, and the propaganda of various interest groups such as alcohol companies and tobacco manufacturers.

"Look, it's time to get tough on crime. More police, wider powers and tougher sentences are what we need!"

Drug use should not be a crime! More police are a waste of money and much more. The police already spend over \$60 million per year relating to the Misuse of Drugs Act. NZ police arrest cannabis users at a rate 50% higher than even the US. Every year about 15,000 people are arrested on about 25,000 cannabis charges. 85% of those are for small personal offences. The United States, our policy model, now has over 2,000,000 people in prison, over 500,000 of whom are there for non-violent drug offences. Tougher sentences do not, and have never led to a decrease in offending or re-offending.

The developed country with the highest rate of imprisonment, longest sentences and most executions, the USA, also has the highest rate of serious crime. Tougher sentences fill up jails with more innocent users, subjected to the inhumanity and injustice of the prison system, while also hiding real levels of social dissatisfaction and unemployment. The fact that 10% of employment aged black Americans from impoverished districts in the United States are currently in prison has in part been credited with the fall in unemployment figures in the last decade. Relevant to New Zealand?

"Well I don't need drugs to have a good time!"

Good for you buddy, but this is no argument against legalisation. Legalisation doesn't make people use drugs, it simply gives them enough information and a suitable environment so that if they choose, they can use drugs safely.

Simon E. (with thanks to NORML & J.D. for valuable info)

South Island Waterfront...

The struggle continues!

Now into its seventh month, the South Island ports dispute shows no sign of letting up. Indeed, with mediation talks having ending in deadlock, all the indications are that Carter Holt Harvey is more determined than ever to press ahead with its union-busting exercise, while for its part the Waterfront Workers' Union (WWU) looks set to continue with its strategy of "peaceful picketing".

Yet it will not be a return to "business as usual", for three months at the bargaining table has left the WWU in a far worse position than before. Undoubtedly much of the blame for this can be placed on the union officials, who failed to build on the momentum generated by the hundreds of people who turned up to the picket lines to show their solidarity with watersiders.

However, this still does not answer the essential question of why the union leadership chose not to take the initiative and go on the offensive when quite clearly a course of militant industrial action backed up by a coordinated campaign of civil disobedience represented the best chance of victory. Part of the answer must lie with the harsh new anti-strike provisions contained in the Employment Relations Act (ERA) introduced by the Labour-Alliance Government last year. Not only are workers who take "illegal" strike action liable to incur \$5,000 fines and/or lengthy terms of imprisonment, but even in the case of legitimate strike action the union must first submit to compulsory mediation – the famous "good faith" bargaining clause.

The history of the working class in this country is littered with examples of supposedly "impartial" decisions handed down by government-appointed arbitration commissions that have resulted in defeat after defeat for workers while always safeguarding the interests of the ruling class. Behind all the rhetoric about a "new era" in workplace relations, the current vogue for "resolving" industrial disputes through mediation is based on the same principle: to guarantee the profitability and productivity of big business by forcing workers into a legal straitjacket which prevents them from taking any kind of action against their employer. In the case of the waterfront dispute the mediation process has played a crucial role in defusing what could have been a very damaging situation for Carter Holt.

So how then are we to explain the

attitude of the union officials, who seem prepared to sacrifice just about anything for the sake of this futile exercise?

Conservative Role

It is important to understand the essentially conservative role that the trade union bureaucracy plays within the labour movement. The position of a union official is basically that of a bargaining agent, negotiating with the employer on behalf of the workers who they represent in a bid to obtain higher wages and conditions. Yet



Port Bluff: 4 June 2001 – the cops break up a peaceful sit-in by WWU supporters who turned out on a freezing winter morning to defend jobs and stop port casualisation

their relatively privileged status means that their interests are not the same as those of rank-and-file union members. For one thing, they tend to see the maintenance of "good relations" with employers as their most important goal.

Quite simply, they have a vested interest in preserving the status quo – the unequal relationship between the employer who controls the means of production and the worker who is compelled to sell their labour in order to meet their economic needs. As such, the union official will generally oppose shop floor militancy except as a means of forcing the employer to give them a seat at the bargaining table.

This can be clearly seen in the present waterfront dispute, where the WWU

leadership has run pickets at Nelson, Bluff and Port Chalmers, only to withdraw them once safely ensconced in mediation talks. Yet these "gestures of good faith" have not met with the desired response – instead, Carter Holt and Mainland Stevedoring (the scab company) have taken out a High Court injunction that effectively bars the WWU from engaging in any kind of protest action. In the meantime, the workers themselves are further away from regaining their jobs than ever before.

Union Work

However, we should not allow this bleak scenario to discourage us from continuing to work within the trade union movement, for while the leadership may be conservative we cannot hope to win workers over to our ideas if we cut ourselves off from the rank-and-file. Over the last few months we have already begun to see the potential for union officials to radically alter their position when they are directly challenged and put under pressure.

Like all politicians, union officials must be careful not to alienate their constituency if they are to hold out any hope of re-election. So they can be pushed to support more militant demands if they think that their position is under threat. This in turn highlights the importance of building a revolutionary socialist organisation – one capable of bringing together the most organised and militant sections of the working class to argue effectively against the narrow reformism of the trade union leadership.

Nor should we imagine that victory in the current dispute can be won by the waterfront workers fighting alone. Instead it will require all of us to get active on our campus or workplace and help build a genuine movement that can take on the might of Carter Holt Harvey. In a more immediate and practical way we can offer our support on the picket lines, as members of the International Socialist Organisation have been doing over the last seven months at Bluff and Port Chalmers and as we will continue to do until Carter Holt and their big business allies are finally defeated. We urge students and workers to join with us in opposing the use of scab labour on the waterfront and strike a blow against corporate tyranny. ■

Tim Bowron

“Culture Wars”



Terry Eagleton

What is culture? What are today's “Culture Wars”? Terry Eagleton unpacks the meaning of the term “culture”, and the idea of two different kinds of Culture – and culture – and their interaction.

The word “culture” has always seemed both too broad and too narrow to be really useful. Its aesthetic meaning includes Stravinsky but not necessarily science fiction; its anthropological sense may stretch from hairstyles and drinking habits to the manufacture of drainpipes. In its turbulent career as a concept, culture has been both a synonym and an antonym of “civilisation”, has pivoted between actual and ideal, and hovered precariously between the descriptive and the normative.

In its narrower sense, the word means the arts and fine living: the arts define what makes life worth living, but they are not themselves what we live for. It suggests rather patronisingly that science, philosophy, politics and economics can no longer be regarded as “creative” (for what historical reason is this so?) and implies rather alarmingly that civilised values are now to be found only in fantasy.

Culture in this Schillerian or Arnoldian sense is an antidote to sectarianism, keeping in mind serenely untainted by one-sided commitments and plucking a universal humanity from our squalid, empirical, everyday selves. Yet since this blithe

Hellenism sets its face against specific practical interests, it can realise itself in action only at the cost of betraying itself. The action necessary to secure it undermines its own harmonious symmetry. But you can still strive to link this sense of culture to others, in a three-step process: culture as aesthetic defines a quality of life (culture as civility) which it is the task of politics to realise in culture as a whole (culture as corporate form of life).

Six historical developments in modernity put the notion of culture on the agenda. First, culture drifts to the fore the moment “civilisation” itself begins to seem contradictory. Once the idea of civilisation, in post-Enlightenment Europe, becomes more of a drably factual term than an upliftingly normative one, culture begins to counter it as utopian critique. Second, culture springs into prominence once it is realised that without radical social change (culture in that sense) the future of the arts and fine living (culture in that other sense) is in dire jeopardy. For culture to survive, you have to change the culture. Third, with Herder and German idealism, culture in the sense of a distinctive, traditional perhaps ethnic way of life provides a convenient way of belabouring

Enlightenment universalism.

Fourth, culture starts to matter once Western imperialism is faced with the conundrum of alien life-forms which *must* be inferior but which seem in reasonably good shape. Culture, like Raymond Williams's masses, is in short, other people. The Victorians didn't see themselves as a culture, since the relativising, self-estranging effect of this move would have been too damaging. In the era of imperialism, then, the West is confronted with the spectre of cultural relativism at the precise moment at which it needs to affirm its own spiritual privilege.

The other two reasons for the prominence of the idea of culture belong more to our era. First, need one say, the culture industry: that historic moment in which cultural or symbolic production, separated from other forms of production in the great epoch of modernity, is finally reintegrated with them to become part of general commodity production as such. Second, in the past few decades, the fact that for the three currents which have dominated the global political agenda – feminism, revolutionary nationalism and ethnicity – culture in the broad sense of identity, value, sign, language, life-style, shared history, belonging or solidarity, is the very language in which one articulates one's political demands, not an agreeable bonus. This is true of identity politics as it not so much, of say, industrial class struggle or the politics of famine.

And this, from the viewpoint of a classical conception of culture, is a dramatic, indeed momentous

development. For the whole point of culture, classically speaking, was that it was the terrain on which we could, for a blessed moment of transcendence, put in suspension all our quirky idiosyncrasies of religion, gender, status, profession, ethnicity and the like, and meet instead on the common ground of the fundamentally human. If culture in the more narrow, aesthetic sense mattered, it was because it provided a way of lugging these human values around with us in conveniently portable form, as well as fleshing them out as sensuous experience. To this extent, culture was part of the solution; but what has happened over the past few decades – one major reason why the notion has been plunged into spectacular crisis – is that it has veered on its axis from being part of the solution to being part of the problem. Culture no longer means a terrain of consensus but an arena of contention. For postmodernism, culture means not the transcendence of identity but the formation of one.

Of course in one sense, culture and crisis go together like Laurel and Hardy. Culture and crisis were born at a stroke. The very notion of culture is a strategic response to historical crisis. But for us, here and now, that crisis has assumed a distinctive form, which one might summarise as the opposition between Culture and culture. Culture (in the sense of universal civility) is itself cultureless, is indeed in a sense the enemy of culture in this lower-case sense. It denotes not a particular way of life, but those values which ought to inform any way of life whatsoever. Or, rather, Culture is at once culture-bound (roughly, speaking, part of Western

modernity) and the very implicit standard by which particular cultures can be identified and evaluated in the first place. It is, then, in an exact philosophical sense transcendental – the very conditions of possibility of a culture as such – while nevertheless taking on flesh and blood in a particular way of life, rather as God had to incarnate himself *somewhere*, and for some mysterious reason chose first-century Palestine to do so.

One can think of Culture, perhaps, in terms of the Romantic imagination. The imagination is not bound by a specific time and place: it just is that infinite capacity for universal sympathy which allows us to penetrate the spirit of any specific time, place, object or identity whatsoever. It is thus, rather like the Almighty for whom it is a secular substitute, both everything and nothing. This protean, quicksilver force has no identity of its own: – its identity consists simply in the sympathetic capacity to assume other people's identities, indeed to know them better than they know themselves. It occupies all identities from within, yet precisely by doing so transcends any one of them, since no one of them can rival this power. Cultures (in the lower-case sense) know themselves, whereas what Culture knows is them. And the affinity of this benign power to the more liberal forms of imperialism need not, I imagine, be laboured. Culture is not a particular way of life but the custodian of cultures; and so, stateless and timeless that it is, it assumes the right to intervene into such cultures in the name of Culture, which is to say, ultimately, in the name of their own good.

Cultures are uncultured, at least from the standpoint of Culture, because they are blatantly, sometimes militantly particular, resonant of nothing but themselves, and without such difference would simply disappear. What they do, from Culture's somewhat disdainful standpoint, is seize perversely upon particularity in the sense of historical contingency – upon pure accidents (in the scholastic sense) of place, provenance, sex, occupation, skin colour and the like – and elevate these which are not for Hegel "In the Idea", to universal status. Culture, for its part, is concerned not with the contingently particular but with that very different animal, the essentially individual; and its aim is to set up a direct circuit between individual and universal, bypassing the sordidly empirical *en route*. Indeed what could be more uniquely individual, more wholly self-referential and *sui generis*, than the universe itself?

Now the momentous event of our own time is that this war of versions of culture is not, for good or ill, merely a clash between those tedious old fogies in the English department who still study line-endings in Milton, and those bright young things down the corridor who write books on masturbation. Would in a sense that it were! Would in a way that culture were indeed, as the vulgar leftists claim, remote from everyday life. In Bosnia or Belfast or the Basque country, however, culture isn't just what you put in the CD player or gaze at in the gallery: culture is what you kill for. The conflict between Culture and cultures has now become mapped on a geopolitical axis, between the West and the rest, so that what Western Culture in the sense of universal

subjectivity and civility confronts is culture in the sense of nationalism, regionalism, nativism, corporatism, communitarianism, family values, religious fundamentalism, ethnic solidarity, new Ageism and the like – corporate forms of culture which lay siege to it both within and without the gates. This is not, need one say, just a combat between north and south of the globe – partly because some of the enemies are also within, partly because say, Islamic liberalism sets its face against Texas fundamentalism, or Indian socialism contests European racism. In any case, nothing is more claustrophobically corporate than the brave new world of the transnational corporations, which can be quite as closed and homogenised as the most parochial of tribes of incestuously intimate of Southern Baptist neighbourhoods.

Even so, the geopolitical axis is now pretty obvious – or, if you prefer, the stalled dialectic between these alternative meanings of culture, which increasingly paint each other into a corner. The more emptily formalistic universality becomes – the more it becomes synonymous with capitalist globalisation – the more ingrown and pathological become the cultural defences against it. The more the liberal humanists falsely celebrate William Blake as the voice of the eternally human, the more they ditch him in California as a Dead White Male. For every European liberal, a neo-Nazi thug; for every jet-setting corporate executive for whom anyone who might be a customer is human, a local patriot for whom humanity exists strictly on this side of the mountains. A vacuous

globalism confronts a militant particularism, as the torn halves of a freedom to which they do not add up.

But our culture wars are in fact three-corners, not a simple polarity. There is, to begin with, high or minority culture, or better what Fredric Jameson has called "NATO high culture". This version of culture is, so to speak, the spiritual wing of the EU, and must increasingly betray its own serene, harmonious, disinterested symmetry by unilateral military operations which succeed only in unmasking the very spiritual universalism they are intended to prop up. As the West continues to define itself as the wronged Goliath squaring bravely up to the bullying Davids, we are likely to witness more of this self-subversion, in which liberal universalism redefines its slogan "Nothing human is alien to me" as: "Even the most obscure backwater can threaten our profits".

The outlook for the West here, however, is not exactly sanguine, since part of what we are living through, in the period after the classical nation-state, is a skewing of cultural and political forms, or if you like a failure (so far, anyway) of new transnational political forms to achieve their essential cultural correlatives. Not many people are ready quite yet to throw themselves on the barricades with a defiant shout of "Long Live the European Community!" Politics needs people's cultural or psychic investments if it is to thrive, but the contradiction here is that culture is a less abstract affair than politics, a matter of what we live on the body and in the gut and on the pulses. And with our kinsfolk, and so always potentially

askew to the necessarily universal forms of the state, not to speak of the transnational. Indeed it was the hyphen in the phrase "nation-state" which for a triumphant moment of modernity secured the link between culture and politics, people and government, local and universal, kinship and polis, ethnic and civic; and another reason why the notion of culture is in big trouble is because the nation-state is too. The nation-state was in its day a marvelously resourceful way of linking individual and universal, sensuous particularity and formal abstraction, as indeed was that other great invention of modernity, the work of art. I mean the work of art as reconstituted from the ground up by what we know as aesthetics, for which the artwork was important because it figured forth a whole revolutionary new kind of totality, a new relationship between particular and whole, one in which the law of the whole was no more than the articulation of its sensuous particulars.

This minority meaning of culture, then, survives; but in today's world is enters into strange contradictions with two other versions of culture. First, culture as corporate particularity, or identity politics, as the old "exotic" anthropological meaning is now refurbished and begins to spawn wildly to include gun culture, deaf culture, beach culture, police culture, gay culture, Zulu culture, Microsoft culture and the like: a universe of sensuous particulars which unlike the classical work of art tends to deny the universal altogether. Thirdly, there is of course mass, commercial or market-driven culture, these last two versions taken together comprising, I suppose, what

we know as postmodern culture. One might summarise the trio, far too glibly, as excellence, *ethnos* and economics. Or one might plot them along an alternative axis, that of universalism, parochialism and cosmopolitanism.

But just look at some of their curious interactions. For example, the more the postmodern market culture of the West penetrates the globe (and there is now an institute for postmodern studies in Beijing), the more the West needs to find some sort of spiritual legitimacy for this somewhat overweening global operation. But the more market forces proliferate, the more a skeptical, relativist, provisional anti-foundational postmodern culture within the West undermines the very forms of stable, solid values which market culture needs to draw upon for its orderly framework, and which the west needs to appeal to for its spiritual authority. One can't, in other words, easily take the Nietzschean way out here, which is just to ditch the superstructural authority ("God is dead") and celebrate the provisionality. Or rather, it is easier to recommend this if you are running a humanities department rather than a state. Neo-pragmatist forms of justification of a Rortyan kind – "this is just what we white liberal Western bourgeois do, take it or leave it" – are both too ideologically feeble and too politically laid-back for a West which is not only now claiming an overreaching global authority for itself, but which is faced by enemies elsewhere which have much stronger, more foundational forms of cultural legitimation such as Islam. At the same time, however, Western capitalism itself creates the kind of jaded, skeptical, post-metaphysical ambience which gives a

distinctly hollow, implausible ring to the kind of high-rhetorical foundational appeals – the Destiny of the West, the triumph of Reason, the Will of God, the White Man's Burden – which served the bourgeoisie supremely well in their time.

In fact, if one wanted yet another reason for the crisis of culture in the West, one might do worse than answer: the failure of religion. I must remind myself here of course that the United States has more churches than hamburger joints – that the most materialist nation is a rampantly *metaphysical* society, and that it is still *de rigueur* for US politicians to make solemn, sentimental, high-toned appeals to the Almighty's special regard for their great country. (Here, incidentally, is another problem with the ideal, utopian or rhetorical sense of culture: the fact that one cannot just briskly dispense with it, yet that all it is likely to do is expose the embarrassing gap between the ideal and the actual, reveal the performative contradiction between what capitalist societies do, and what they say they do). It was, of course, not the atheistic left which brought religion low as an ideological form, but in a supreme irony, capitalism itself, whose ruthless secularising and rationalising cannot help discrediting the very metaphysical values it needs to legitimate itself.

Culture, delicate, evanescent, impalpable creature that it is, was called upon in the nineteenth century to stand in for religion itself – a function which brought it under such intense pressure that it began to betray pathological symptoms. Religion had always done

the job much better, with its close fusion of the intelligentsia (priests) and popular masses, of ritual and inwardness, its linking of the immediate textures of personal experience to the most cosmic of questions. With religion, an aesthetic ritual or symbolic form involves millions of the common people and it is directly relevant to their daily lives: an extraordinary cultural phenomenon in the age of modernity. Culture in the minority, specialised sense, however, cannot play this role, since it is shared by too few people; while culture in the more corporate sense cannot do it either because it is too clearly a terrain of combat rather than a transcendental resolution of conflict.

Culture in the traditional sense, then, is nowadays assailed by identity politics, market culture and postmodern post-ideological skepticism – yet the irony is that it colludes with these antagonists too, and sometimes helps to create them. Identity politics at its worst – paranoid, supremacist, bigoted – is a kind of bad particularity which is just the flipside of a bad universality. Culture as civility provides the frame within which culture as marketeering can securely operate. And high and market culture quite often share the same conservative values, since an art at the mercy of market forces is likely to be just as cautious, conformist and anti-experimental as the most respectably canonical of works. In any case, much high NATO culture is far to the left of NATO. Homer wasn't a liberal humanist, Shakespeare put in a good word for radical egalitarianism, Balzac and Flaubert detested the bourgeoisie, Tolstoy rejected private property and so on. It is not just what these works of art

say, but what they are made to signify, which is the political point.

Culture as universality has much more going for it than the postmodernists seem to imagine. It was a revolutionary, earth-shattering notion in its day – the extraordinary idea that you were entitled to freedom and respect, liberty, equality and self-determination, not because of who you were or where you came from or what you did, but simply because you were a human being: a member of the universal species. It was *the ancien regime* here that was particularist, local, differential, and abstraction and universality which were radical, as the supposedly historically-minded postmodernists don't seem to appreciate. Marx was an apostle of Enlightenment; but Marxism is a curious cross-breed of the Enlightenment and Romanticism, since Marx also recognised that if a genuine universality were to be fashioned (and we cannot presume with the liberal humanists that it is simply *given*), it would have to be constructed in and through difference and particularity (which Marx sometimes alludes to as use-value). Particularity, as with the Hegel from whom Marx is cribbing here, must return again, this time at the level of the genuinely universal; which simply means that the universal reciprocities of socialism must be established, but as relations between the richly individuated, sensuously particularised men and women which class-society had helped to foster. Any more-than-parochial community has to begin with where and what people, parochially or bodily, are; and if it can do so successfully it is because there is no local particular which is not open-

ended, differential and overlapping. The purely local, strictly speaking, does not exist. People are what they are because their sensuous particularity is *constitutively* open to an outside: to be fully on the inside of a body, language or culture is to already open to a beyond.

We have witnessed in our time an enormous inflation of the notion of culture, to the point where the vulnerable, suffering, material, bodily, *objective* species-life which we share most evidently in common has been hubristically swept aside by the follies of so-called culturalism. It is true that culture is not only what we live by, but in a sense what we live for. Affection, relationship, memory, belonging, emotional fulfillment, intellectual enjoyment: these are closer to most of us than trade arrangements or political contracts. Yet nature will always finally have the edge over culture, a phenomenon known as death, however much neurotically self-inventing societies seek implicitly to deny it. And culture can always be too close for comfort. Its very intimacy is likely to grow morbid and obsessional unless we place it in an enlightened political context, one which can temper these immediacies with more abstract, but also in a way more generous, affiliations.

Culture in our time has waxed overweening and immodest. It is time, while acknowledging its significance, to put it firmly back in its place. ■

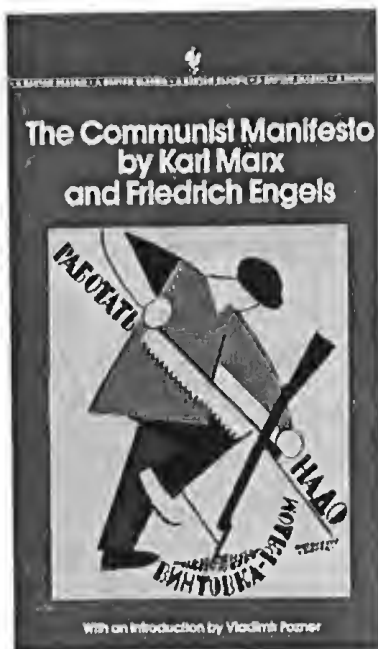
RED WORDS

What makes a book good or bad?

Is it all down to personal taste, or is there more to it?

Some people turn up their noses at pulp fiction, forgetting that even their darling Shakespeare wrote for ordinary people, not professors. Other people say there's no such thing as a good or bad book, but if a writer or a musician is popular they automatically assume they're brilliant. I'm pretty certain there's a difference between good and bad books, though I can't always say why. Sometimes a good book will be easy to read, sometimes difficult, some will be tragic, some funny, some written in the language of angels and others scratched in the mud by a half-literate monkey. Three things do matter though: a good story, honest characters and optimism. Optimism is the magic ingredient that makes a story work politically. It doesn't mean

there has to be a happy ending, just that there could be a happy ending. Lack of optimism makes George Orwell's *1984* a squalid, untruthful book - in direct contrast to *We*, by Yevgeny Zamyatin. *We* is more hopeful than *1984* and also more tragic. It delivers a bitter political rebuke to the Stalinist regime in a way that Orwell in his despair could never do. How honest the characters in a book are usually tells you how much the author cares. Most blockbuster characters are pretty two-dimensional, fun to read once, but you won't learn anything about life there. And a good story? That's because books are for enjoying if you can, like life.



Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels

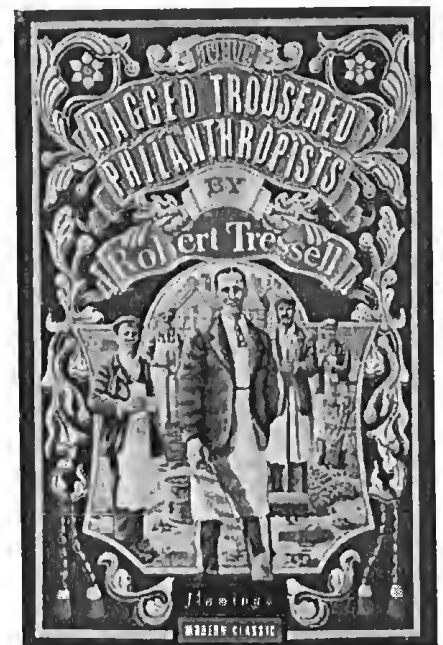
The Communist Manifesto

One of the best storybooks ever written. Marx and Engels wrote some heavy stuff, but they also understood how to communicate. The Manifesto is short. If you find

Reviews by Andrew Tait

it intimidating, then skip the intro and get straight into the story. It's like a journey through time as Karl and Friedrich strip back the chrome styling of history and have a look at what's under the bonnet.

It starts from the basics, like any good story: food, warmth and shelter. How we get them tells you how society works. The Communist Manifesto also tells the story of the conflict at the heart of human history. It's got a monster, the Insatiable Profit Motive, and heroes - you and me. But don't treat it like a rare and perfect flower, grab a red pen and scribble all over. Ask those old men the hard questions: Did you think about the environment, Friedrich? Aren't you being a little sexist here, Karl? And guys, is the economy really the same now as it was 150 years ago? Adapt it, adopt it, bring it into the 21st Century.



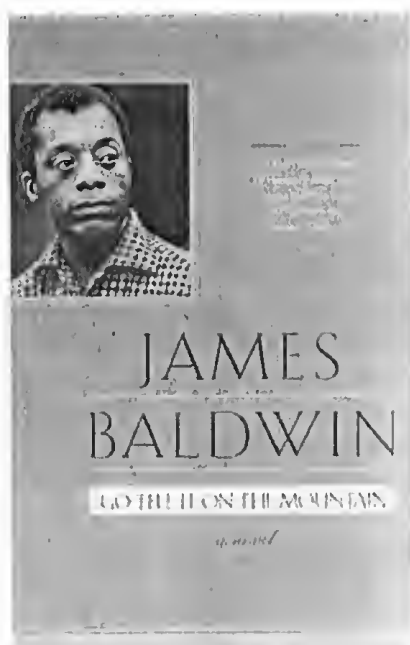
Robert Tressell

The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists

In some ways this book is the opposite of the Manifesto. Instead of a grand overview Tressell writes about the daily struggle for survival. It's not stylishly

written, but it's brutally realistic and completely absorbing. The author worked as a house painter in 19th century England, and he saw first hand the way capitalism extracted all it could from working people. Like Tressell's own life, this book has no happy ending, but to read it is to appreciate the victories of past generations, and recognise the same parasitic patterns today - whether you're a house painter, a nurse, or a computer technician.

turbulent 1960s and '70s. Baldwin writes about the struggle against racism from first hand, from Martin Luther King's non-violence to the Black Panthers. These stories are inspiring, because the people in them keep surviving. No matter how brutal the system, or how much their lives seem locked in, they never give up. Baldwin's only optimism is his honesty though. Struggle is a grim necessity, and hope only exists because you need it to keep fighting.

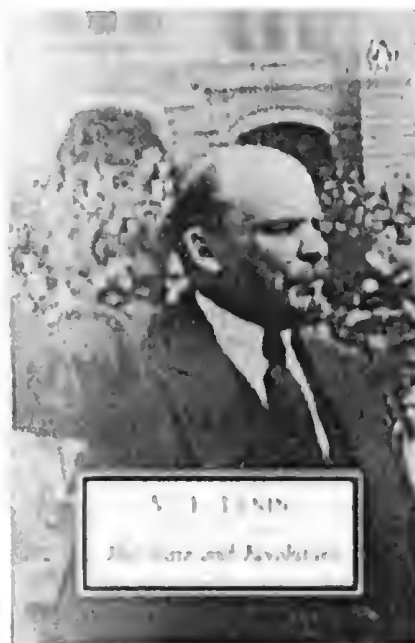


James Baldwin

Go Tell it On the Mountain

James Baldwin tells the story of another side of struggle - growing up black in the wealthiest land in the world. Nothing I have read better describes the racist disease, and the way it communicates itself through society and across generations, destroying lives as it goes. Baldwin's work is controlled, even clinical, but driven by fire, his vision acute and his style brilliant.

Everything of his I've read is good, but start with *No Name in the Street*, essays about the



V. I. Lenin

The State and Revolution

To be frank, the strategist of the revolution doesn't really cut it in the storytelling department, and the characters in *State and Revolution* are either geniuses who agree with Lenin, or numbskulls who disagree - but what glorious, abundant optimism! He knows full well the grim necessity of struggle but he also knows the best way to go about it. So optimism flows into action, instead of souring into despair. Why read it? Because you might be critical of the system, but

strategy is vital. If you've got it wrong, you're lost. Again, though, pull out the red pen: Lenin's not St Paul to Marx's Jesus. He wrote this book as part of a debate at the time, and to grasp it you have to join in the argument. Scribble in the margins, trample on it, burn it in a fit of rage, go and buy another copy, share it with your friends.



Giovanni Guareschi *The Little World of Don Camillo*

Stories of Italian village life, with a parish priest for the hero? What's that doing in a socialist mag? Quite simply, because they're wonderful stories. Guareschi was writing in the 1950s and '60s, at the height of the Cold War, when Italy was split between communism and conservatism.

Guareschi was no fan of Stalin, but he understood and loved Stalinists, like the village mayor, Peppone, who spends his days in constant rivalry with Don Camillo, belting each other with benches, or hoarding machine guns, or best of all humiliating the other. It's good when you're sick of ideology and political infighting because at the end of the day, Peppone and Don Camillo knew that sharing a bottle of wine with a friend is what really matters. Guareschi's no Marxist, but he has great respect for the good sense of ordinary people, and these stories overflow with the milk of human kindness. What's more, they're online at:

<http://members.tripod.com/~vajrang/littleworld/>

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just what **are** your politics anyway?

The more observant among you may have noticed that this magazine's politics aren't quite the same as the mainstream media's. So just where do we stand? Below are some of the basic political ideas behind our magazine.

Socialism Capitalism is a system of crisis, exploitation and war in which production is for profit, not human need.

Although workers create society's wealth, they have no control over its production or distribution. A new society can only be built when workers collectively seize control of that wealth and create a new state in which they will make the decisions about the economy, social life and the environment.

Workers' Power Only the working class has the power to create a society free from exploitation, oppression and want.

Liberation can be won only through the struggles of workers themselves, organised independently of all other classes and fighting for real workers' power – a new kind of state based on democratically elected workers' councils.

China and Cuba, like the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, have nothing to do with socialism. They are repressive state capitalist regimes. We support the struggles of workers against every ruling class.

Revolution Not Reformism Despite the claims of Labour, Alliance and trade union leaders, the structures of the present parliament, army, police and judiciary cannot be taken over and used by the working class.

They grew up under capitalism and are designed to protect the ruling class against workers.

There is no parliamentary road to socialism.

Internationalism Workers in every country are exploited by capitalism, so the struggle for socialism is part of a worldwide struggle.

We oppose everything that divides workers of different countries. We oppose all immigration controls.

We campaign for solidarity with workers in other countries. We oppose imperialism and support all genuine national liberation struggles.

Liberation From Oppression We fight for democratic rights. We are opposed to the oppression of women, Māori, Pacific Islanders, gays and lesbians. These forms of oppression are used to divide the working class.

We support the right of all oppressed groups to organise for their own defence.

All these forms of liberation are essential to socialism and impossible without it.

Tino Rangatiratanga We support the struggle for tino rangatiratanga.

Māori capitalists and politicians have no interest in achieving tino rangatiratanga for working class Māori.

The Government and corporate warriors' approach to Treaty claims has benefited a Māori elite while doing little for working class Māori.

Tino rangatiratanga cannot be achieved within capitalism. It will only become a reality with the establishment of a workers' state and socialist society.

Revolutionary Organisation To achieve socialism, the most militant sections of the working class have to be organised into a revolutionary socialist party. Such a party can only be built by day to day activity in the mass organisations of the working class.

We have to prove in practice to other workers that reformist leaders and reformist ideas are opposed to their own interests.

We have to build a rank and file movement within the unions.

We are beginning to build such a party, linking the ideas of revolutionary socialism to workers' struggles against the system. If you agree with our ideas and want to fight for socialism, we urge you to join us.

check out our website for meeting details, online articles, cool links & more, point your web browser at:

www.isonz.homestead.com

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Socialist Review were

**Tim Bowron, Andrew Cooper,
Terry Eagleton, Simon Edmunds,
Penny Hayes, Dougal McNeill,
J.P. Ryan, Rae Sinclair &
Andrew Tait**

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Cartoons by **Hinze**



In the next issue of *Socialist Review*, we
examine the growing anti-capitalist
movement around the world (it *will*
be in the next issue – promise!)

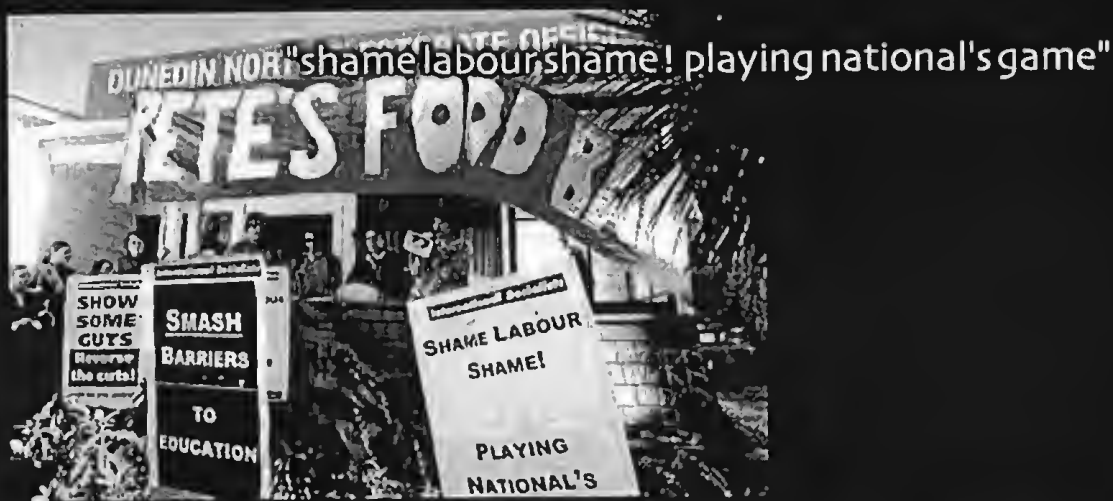


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